

Hero of Revolutionary War settled in Rutherford County

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One early Rutherford County resident was a hero at the battle of King's Mountain during the American Revolution. Joseph Dickson served as a major at King's Mountain with a group of men from Lincoln County, N.C. And he was a close associate of General. Griffith Rutherford, for whom our county is named.

King's Mountain was a very unique battle fought entirely by Americans ... Tories and patriots. The Tory army was under command of Major. Patrick Ferguson, who was in command of 1,000 Loyalist troops. The 900 Patriots were under no central command and were ripe for revenge for incidents like the Battle of Waxhaw, where British Col. Banastre Tarleton ordered his men to kill many of the surrendered Virginia troops.

Ferguson acerbated the ill will by publishing a broadsheet mocking "the backwater men:"

"Gentlemen: —Unless you wish to be eat up by an inundation of barbarians, who have begun by murdering an unarmed son before the aged father, and afterwards lopped off his arms, and who by their shocking cruelties and irregularities, give the best proof of their cowardice and want of discipline; I say, if you wish to be pinioned, robbed, and murdered, and see your wives and daughters, in four days, abused by the dregs of mankind—in short, if you wish or deserve to live, and bear the name of men, grasp your arms in a moment and run to camp.

"The Back Water men have crossed the mountains; McDowell, Hampton, Shelby and Cleveland are at their head, so that you know what you have to depend upon. If you choose to be degraded forever and ever by a set of mongrels, say so at once, and let your women turn their backs upon you, and look out for real men to protect them."

He had intended the broadside to build support for the crown, but it turned out to be his death warrant.

Ferguson's scarlet-clad Tory troops proved to be easy prey for "Over the Mountain" troops who used highly- accurate hunting rifles to pick them off the side of the mountain. During the hour-long battle, Loyalists lost 225 dead and 716 were captured. The Patriots lost 28.

Ferguson, who used a silver whistle to issue commands, was shot multiple times and died on the battlefield. It was said his body was stripped and urinated on by his angry foes in retribution for British atrocities.

For his deeds in North Carolina, the name of Joseph Dickson is still revered. He is all but forgotten in the community where he lived his last years.

Prior to the battle at Ramsour's Mill, General. Griffin Rutherford and his forces camped at Dickson's farm near Mount Holly, N.C.

On June 20, 1780, one of the bloodiest partisan battles of the American Revolutionary War was fought in the foothills of North Carolina between neighbors and friends. The two-hour pitched battle in Lincoln County, N.C., resulted in more than 70 dead on both sides, including five Patriot and four Loyalist captains. Another 200 were wounded, some of whom later died. The Loyalists and Patriots did not wear uniforms. The only distinguishing mark was a pine twig in the hats of the Patriots and a piece of white cloth worn by the Loyalists.

Later, at King's Mountain, Dickson led his "South Fork boys" up the rugged northeast end of the mountain. By the following year, Dickson's rank had risen to colonel. That same year, 1781, he was elected county clerk, a title he held for the next decade.

Dickson was chairman of the committee that selected the site of Lincolnton, and the grant for the land on which the town was built was made to him. The grantor to all original purchasers of lots is, "Joseph Dickson, Esq., proprietor in trust for the commissioners appointed to lay off a town in the county of Lincoln by the name of Lincolnton."

By 1788, he was selected state senator from Lincoln County serving until 1795. In 1789 Dickson was selected by the General Assembly to serve as one of the first trustees of the University of North Carolina. By that point, he served as a general in the militia.

From 1799 to 1801 he served as a member of the U.S. Congress. He was a Federalist in the waning days of that political party.

Serving at King's Mountain did not hurt Dickson's career even after he moved to Tennessee.

He represented Rutherford County in the state House of Representatives from 1807-1811 and served as Speaker of the House his last two years in the General Assembly. He died at age 80 at his plantation northeast of Murfreesboro on April 24, 1825 and was buried with military and Masonic honors.